

**Oral Remarks of
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United States Department of Agriculture**

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on
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Concerning

S. 198 – the Harmful Nonnative Weed Control Act of 2000

Senator Craig, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this workshop today. I am Mark Rey, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Department of Agriculture.

First, I would like to commend you for recognizing harmful nonnative noxious weeds as a significant threat to our nation's ecosystem health and for introducing S. 198. Nonnative invasive plants alter ecosystem functions and reduce biological diversity by eliminating native plants, which in turn can lower the water table, increase soil erosion and runoff, and/or increase fire frequency and intensity. Nonnative invasive plants also change the plant community used by domestic livestock, wildlife, and recreationists. These changes in the ecosystem often result in eliminating or restricting the use of our wildlands and urban areas and increase management costs.

USDA supports the objectives of S. 198 to address the problem of nonnative invasive plants.

However, we need to identify more clearly the possible costs of this proposal and how it would

be funded within the contest of a balance budget. The Department supports the premise of the bill, that controlling invasive plants should be solved at the local level with support provided by a multitude of partners, but has some concerns regarding S. 198 that it would like to work on with the Committee.

Populations of nonnative invasive species in the U.S. are expanding annually by 7 to 14 percent. We face a daunting challenge in managing nonnative invasive species, but the Department is committed to working with the Committee to identify solutions. USDA has numerous programs and delivery systems already in place under existing statutory authorities to address nonnative invasive species management, which include: prevention, detection, control, monitoring and restoration; research and technology development; technical assistance to States, Tribes and private landowners; financial assistance including cooperative agreements and grants; and international collaboration. Within the Forest Service in particular, there is a full range of existing authorities to support an integrated program of research and development, management of nonnative invasive species on public land, and technical and financial assistance to private landowners. These programs focus on invasive insects such as the Asian longhorn beetle and Gypsy Moth, invasive pathogens such as Sudden Oak Death, and invasive plants that grow after a fire such as yellow starthistle.

Existing Authorities in USDA

Currently, within USDA there are six agencies that have a leadership role in dealing with the introduction and spread of nonnative invasive species and are involved in research, regulation, operations, partnerships, technical and financial assistance, and education. USDA's Animal and

Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is the front line of prevention, dealing with interdiction at borders, interstate movement, detecting and mitigating disseminations, and providing eradication of new introductions. The USDA research agencies, the Agricultural Research Service, the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, and the Forest Service, provide information on the basic ecology of nonnative invasive species, as well as detection, monitoring and control methodologies and technologies.

The Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, APHIS, and Farm Service Agency provide technical and financial assistance, consultation, technology transfer, prevention, and landscape restoration following an invasion or to prevent an invasion following a disaster. The nonnative invasive species programs in these agencies run both independently and collaboratively.

The Federal Interagency Committee for Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW) is a prime example of a collaborative government effort affecting land management. FICMNEW was established under a Memorandum Of Understanding signed by 17 Federal Agencies (5 USDA agencies) in 1994, with the charge of enhancing Federal coordination for the management of weeds. Member agencies seek to improve the Federal government's ability to prevent, control, and manage harmful non-indigenous plant species, maintain and restore healthy ecosystems, preserve biological diversity on Native American and Federal lands and waters, and provide assistance to private lands and waters. Federal agencies work cooperatively to achieve this through advancement of knowledge and skills, good land stewardship practices, public awareness of noxious weed issues and management, and

collaborative projects. We will work with the Committee to ensure that S. 198 does not conflict, and where possible enhances, existing USDA programs.

Scope of the Legislation (Local Involvement)

FICMNEW stated in a 1998 report that invasive plants (called nonnative weeds in the bill) cause more than \$20 billion per year in economic damage and affect millions of acres of all types of private and public lands across the United States. S. 198 provides a framework for States and local governments to work with local weed groups to control and eradicate invasive plants.

There currently exist well over 100 weed management areas that have been organized at the local level by various partners in the west.

Partnerships with States (especially those adjoining other States), other Federal agencies, and local groups are important since plants grow across jurisdictional areas. Projects can be split at the State line and funded separately while being coordinated across State lines, but additional constraints are sometimes imposed when this occurs. The 2000 fires in Idaho and Montana, for example, demonstrate how natural forces do not heed political boundaries. As a result of the 2000 fire season, in the states of Idaho and Montana, the Forest Service allocated approximately \$24.7 million in treating invasive plants on National Forest System lands and private lands (\$4.2 million in National Forest System noxious weeds funding, \$17.0 million from the National Fire Plan Restoration program, and \$3.5 million from State and Private Forestry funds). Many of these invasive species treatments are directly attributable to interstate coordination.

The Forest Service through the National Forest System and State and Private Forestry programs supports many local weed organizations and private land owners. Examples include Idaho and Montana:

- a. Idaho has Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) in all but two counties. The Forest Service participates in CMWAs in all counties where the agency has a presence. All National Forests in Idaho have active noxious weed programs. The Salmon Challis National Forest is moving to implement a huge ground based herbicide application program to deal with the aftermath of the 2000 fires. The Sawtooth National Forest (Sawtooth National Recreation Area) is keeping new invaders out of the Area and preventing the spread of existing infestations of spotted knapweed and orange hawkweed. Two Forest Service Regions and four National Forests have hired a coordinator to oversee planning and control efforts of spotted knapweed and rush skeleton weed and other species inside and outside the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. Boy Scout troops out of Fairfield have a hay sale and exchange program for hunters so that only weed free feed is taken onto the National Forests. The Forest Service Research Field Station out of Boise along with the Gooding and Camas Soil Conservation District works with “Kidnappers”, high school kids who monitor, collect and disperse biological control agents. The Salmon Challis National Forest is completing a Forest-wide EIS following the 2000 fires for all types of treatments. The Forest is working with the State to mass bio-control agents to hit a lot of areas fast. Aerial treatment is also being considered.
- b. On the Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF in Montana the Big Hole Weed Partnership is a public-private partnership implementing mapping, treatment, monitoring, and educational outreach efforts over 1.6 million acres. Of the numerous species being treated a few include spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, leafy spurge, and common mullein.
- c. State and Private Forestry has been providing funds for noxious weed treatments on private forested lands since 2001 in Idaho and Montana (approximately \$2 million dollars).

Coordination and Consultation

Agencies in the Department of Agriculture are involved in the National Invasive Species Council (NISC), which was created by Executive Order 13112. NISC is an inter-Departmental Council, co-chaired by the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Interior that is responsible for the coordination and leadership of invasive species activities across the federal government.

Under EO 13112, NISC appoints the Invasive Species Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee provides information and advice for consideration by the Council, and recommends plans and actions at the local, tribal, State, regional, and ecosystem-based levels to achieve the goals and objectives of the Management Plan, *Meeting The Invasive Species Challenge*, completed October 2001.

Coordination and consultation is important between Federal and private landowners who work together to manage nonnative weeds that grow across boundaries. An example of this coordinated effort occurred on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest where noxious weeds were confined to several thousand acres and were still considered to be in manageable patches. Nevada allocated available funds to this area based on the coordinated efforts by local entities and Federal managers to eradicate invasive weeds. The coordination and priority setting that is occurring between Federal, State, and private partners becomes more critical as State and Federal funds are allocated that impact multi-jurisdictional boundaries. USDA would like to work with the Committee to identify language to address the issue of coordination and consultation with Federal agencies. Fostering a climate of cooperation and coordination with all concerned entities results in increased sharing of expertise, information, resources, experience, and applied action to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of any invasive weed management program.

Current Partnership Funding

Nonnative invasive weeds have been coming into this country for over a century, and they are well established in many areas. New species continue to be encountered at our national border and at individual State's borders. USDA along with agencies in the Department of the Interior

has been working with State and local entities for many years on various partnerships to eradicate this problem. Funds have been allocated through these partnerships and the Department continues to participate in them. S. 198 does not identify funding sources for the States allocation, the base payment program, or how this program will relate to projects already funded in USDA. This program could involve significant new funding obligations that are not now assumed in the President's Budget.

An ongoing partnership program the Department of Agriculture is involved in is the multi-agency "Pulling Together Initiative" (PTI). PTI, sponsored by FICMNEW and implemented by the Pulling Together Steering Committee, has been ongoing since 1996, and provides federal matching grants through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for local and regional weed prevention and control projects. Federal agencies involved include the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, Department of Defense, and APHIS. In FY 2001 the Forest Service contributed \$300,000 to this program, in FY 2002 the contribution was \$400,000. In addition to Forest Service support of the PTI program, the Forest Service also directly supports local weed entities through its State and Private Forestry and National Forest System programs. Many projects are already underway with this initiative, which demonstrate some of our best examples of need, partnerships, integrated weed management, and monitoring.

USDA has found that research and technology development is often critical to successful land management, including efforts with State and local partners. Similarly, restoration actions following weed treatments are often key to sustaining control and ecosystem health over the

long-term. Options are needed for supporting applied field tests, technology development and restoration actions, which are essential components of an effective on-the-ground management strategy.

Once weeds are brought under control or eradicated, it is important to consider what will come in behind them. The restoration of a treated area with both native and non-native desirable plants, thus lessening impacts of the treatment as well as improving the health of the site makes the site less vulnerable to re-infestation. Knowledge from research and development helps weed management entities in evaluating what tools and/or techniques can best be used in an area that needs treatment.

In conclusion, nonnative invasive species threaten forest and rangeland sustainability and ecosystem viability. The Department believes this bill is a commendable effort to address nonnative invasive species management on public and private lands. The Department is committed to working cooperatively with the Committee and the bill sponsors toward solutions that will meet our mutual concerns and objectives.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.